

TRAINING BULLETIN

Los Angeles Police Department

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"MARIJUANA"

Marijuana is a widely used derivative of the hardy hemp plant, Cannabis Sativa. Marijuana, also known as "weed," "grass," "420," "chronic," and "smoke," is the most popular illicit drug of abuse in America today.

The purpose of this bulletin is to present information on the identification, packaging, signs and symptoms of marijuana usage.

BACKGROUND

Cannabis Sativa grows wild throughout most of the tropic and temperate regions of the world and has been cultivated since ancient times. The tough fiber of the stem is used in rope, the seeds in animal feed, and the oil in the manufacture of paints. The leaves and resin have been used as a drug for centuries.

One of the chemical components in this plant is delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol or THC, which is an active ingredient that causes hallucinogenic effects. The thick, sticky THC resin is found abundantly in the upper leaves and flowers of the plant. In its unprocessed form, marijuana is the dried leaf of the cannabis plant. The most potent plant is Sinsemilla ("without seed" in Spanish) developed and grown in parts of California and Mexico.

Marijuana was not widely used in the United States until the beginning of the 20th century. It became a popular drug of abuse among the youth in America in the 1950's and 1960's, and its popularity continued thereafter.

IDENTIFICATION OF MARIJUANA

Marijuana is commonly seen as a green-brown plant material. It has a pungent odor that is easily identifiable. Each leaf has an odd number of leaflets (from 5-13). These leaflets are long and slender, pointed at both ends, and have serrated (or saw-toothed) edges. Burning marijuana has a very distinctive sweet odor.

COMMON METHODS OF PACKAGING

Marijuana is generally smuggled into the country in compressed bricks. It looks like a brick or flat block tightly wrapped in plastic and tape.

On the street, it is commonly seen in clear, zip-lock plastic sandwich bags. These are commonly referred to as "nickel bags," or "dime bags," and cost \$5.00 and \$10.00, respectively.

The use of "Blunts," large cheap cigars, has recently become popular. The tobacco of the cigar is hollowed out and replaced with marijuana. Some tobacco is replaced in the tip of the cigar to hide its true contents.

Things To Look For	MARIJUANA
Nystagmus	No
Pupils	Dilated or near normal
Pulse	Elevated
Blood Pressure	Elevated
Mental Status	Mild euphoria Time distortion Space distortion Body tremors Attention loss Inhibitions low
Other signs	Reddened eyes Marijuana odor Increased appetite Poor perception Muscular tremors Yellowish coating on the tongue
Overdose Signs	Paranoia Hallucinations Psychosis

METHODS OF USE

Marijuana is usually smoked; either wrapped in cigarette papers or "Zig Zag" papers, to form a "joint." Abusers also use pipes and special water jars, called "bongs," to smoke the marijuana.

Marijuana can also be eaten and sprinkled on food. In texture, it often resembles small particles of oregano or large tea leaves.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF MARIJUANA INFLUENCE

Odor and/or paraphernalia, along with bloodshot eyes with possibly dilated pupils, and an increased pulse rate are all indicative of marijuana abuse. Intoxication at low-dose may appear similar to that of alcohol, but higher doses produce a relaxed euphoria, hallucinations, and heightened sensations similar to a mild lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) experience.

Marijuana affects a person's ability to pay attention to two or more tasks, concentrate on verbal instructions, and impairs short-term memory. Time and space perception may be distorted, inhibitions are lessened, and there may be disorientation. The immediate effect lasts 2 to 4 hours. However, the THC is changed by the body into a secondary compound that is fat soluble and remains in the body fat for 5 to 8 days. Marijuana can be in the urine for up to three weeks.

The pupils can be of normal size or dilated (or enlarged) and may display rebound dilation upon application of direct light in a darkroom examination of the eyes. The white portion of the eyes may appear bloodshot and reddened. An increased pulse rate is very common (over 90 beats per minute).

OFFICER SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Marijuana trafficking is a financially lucrative business and officers should expect traffickers to be armed and dangerous. Domestic marijuana cultivation or "grows" can be found anywhere, even indoors. These locations may be guarded by dogs or booby-trapped with explosives.

INVESTIGATING INDOOR MARIJUANA GROWS

Indoor marijuana grows have become increasingly popular because the controlled growing conditions will dramatically increase the THC content of the marijuana. This more potent marijuana sells for substantially higher prices.

Officers encountering an indoor marijuana grow should use caution and proceed with the intent of determining the person(s) in control of the grow.

Indoor grows utilize high pressure, high voltage electric lamps and hydroponic watering systems, usually in a makeshift arrangement. Officers shall insure that all electrical power is disconnected prior to entering the grow area. This is done at the main fuse/circuit breakers. Many growers bypass the electric meter. Request the assistance of DWP to shut off the power if you suspect this.

Officers should use extreme caution when working around the high pressure sodium vapor lamps typically used in indoor grows. They will explode when struck by a hard object such as a flashlight or gun handle. They should be removed and packaged by officers wearing protective eyewear and gloves prior to officers entering the grow area.

Officers should have the equipment and plants photographed. Fingerprints are usually found on the light housings and on the aluminized Mylar wall coverings. The plants are counted and their height recorded. Photographs of the roots of a sampling of the plants should be taken. The plants are cut off at the roots and packaged in cardboard containers, never in plastic bags.

The growing equipment may be booked as evidence when feasible. It is recommended that the hydroponic watering system be left intact. They usually contain large amounts of water and fertilizer and will cause considerable structural damage if the water leaks out.

Officers shall interview suspects and get statements. Suspects typically maintain a record of the grow and yields of prior grows. This is invaluable evidence.

Officers should contact their Area Field Enforcement Narcotics Unit for advice and assistance when encountering an indoor marijuana grow.

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FIELD TRAINING SERVICES UNIT
CONTINUING EDUCATION DIVISION

